



## The Andalusian Romance Language

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Andalusian Romance, also known as Mosarabian<sup>1</sup> or Ajami, refers to the type of Iberian Romance in Al Andalus, a part of the Medieval Iberian Peninsula that was under Islamic rule. Before the Muslim entry, the linguistic situation on the Iberian Peninsula had been characterized by a form of Latin-Romance diglossia. The native population spoke an incipient linguistic variety developed from Latin language, known as “Romance,” even they continued to use Latin as their written language. That is, Latin was a language of writing, and Romance was means of oral communication. This linguistic situation was similar to the rest of Romance Empire. More, the picture of linguistic culture of this period was diglossia situation. The native population spoke Romance, while they use Latin in their written language.

In the first centuries of the history of AL-andalus, Andalusian Romance was the first language used the majority of Andalusian society, even by some Muslims as the Muwalladun<sup>2</sup>, who learnt Arabic language as their second language for self – promotion in society. Thus, in the early of eight century, Romance was common tongue for the majority of the Iberian population regardless of whether they had already converted to Islam or had remained Christians, especially at the time of the Umayyad rule, but over the following centuries, Romance was gradually superseded by Arabic as the main spoken language in the Muslim-controlled South. More, the linguistic situation changed to new linguistic landscape not only at the

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<sup>1</sup> Derived from Mozarabs, who are the Christians in the Iberian Peninsula who were permitted to practice their religion Christianity during the Muslim rule.

<sup>2</sup> Christians who had converted in An-andalus under the Islamic rule.



spoken level, but also at the written level as well. That is, Arabic language had increasingly become a medium of oral and written expression and the majority of population of Romance-speakers acquired Arabic during the process of linguistic arabization.

From the period of the entry of the Arabs to the Iberian Peninsula, the Arabic language became the dominant language thanks to the political and social situation of Al-andalus. Moreover, its influence was very deep and the Arabic element then was after Latin, the most important element in the Spanish vocabulary<sup>3</sup>. Actually, the arrival of the new language-Arabic- produced a profound and noticeable change in the linguistic situation of the Peninsula. It imposed clearly as an official and cultural language in Al-andalus. In addition, it acted as superstratum of the Andalusian Romance. To explain, Arabic language was used for formal purposes such as the educational system, religious contexts, governmental speech and literary production, whereas Romance was the everyday spoken language and for the informal contexts.

Apparently, Romance language was not a language of science and culture, and was not special interest for an intellectual point of view due to the lack of a written production at that time. Therefore, Romance was not a language of higher culture like Arabic. In addition, it was so conservative language regarding the innovation and the cultural production of that occurred in the Arabic language. In addition, Romance was the first language by the rural population and the lower classes, whereas the urban Andalusian population underwent more Arabization due to increased exposure to Arabic.

Arabic language was highly valued within the linguistic community, while Romance considered low or vulgar speech. This evidence appeared strongly in poems. To clarify, Arabic language employed for the main corpus of the poems

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<sup>3</sup> Historia de la lengua espaniola, Lapesa, R.ed Biblioteca Romanica Hispanica 1980, editorial Gredos, Madrid, p 135



while the Romance employed for the final verses<sup>4</sup>, which called "kharjas" regarding to the value of the language at that period. So, Romance never used as a main literary language in Al-andalus. Despite its limited used as kharjas in muwashah<sup>5</sup> poems, its presence from a sociolinguistic point of view is quite significant, for it attests to the extended diglossia that must have existed at one stage within the Muslim speech community, having classical Arabic as a language of culture and Romance as a low language<sup>6</sup>.

The displacement of Romance by Arabic language in the Iberian Peninsula in the medieval ages was not by force, the thing that reflected in the continuity of speaking Romance for several centuries under the Islamic rule. This situation was, in fact, out of the spirit of tolerance and co-existence that imposed by Islamic rule in Al-andalus. The integration of different people and culture into one region was really a social and political reality with fruitful results on the ground. Therefore, thanks to the co-existence and integration of all people there were many languages at that time, such as Latin, Romance, and of course Arabic.

Romance language considered low or vulgar before and after the entry of Muslims to the Iberian Peninsula. Meaning, Latin was a dominant language and highly valued within the linguistic community. It was a language of education, religion, science and literature at the written and spoken form. However, Romance was only a language of everyday conversation. This linguistic picture of Romance continued by the Islamic rule. According to the weak background of Romance at the written cultural side, this language continued to be low language and served only in daily conversation especially there was a concentration of monolingual

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<sup>4</sup> Posesia dialectal arabe y Romance en Andalus, Corriente, F, Madrid : Gredos, 1997, p 268-372

<sup>5</sup> A speech arranged in a specific order with different rhymes was known in Al-andalus in the medieval ages

<sup>6</sup> Comparative history of literatures in the Iberian Peninsula, Volume 1, edited by Fernando Cabo Aseguinolza, Anvo Abuin Gonzalez, Cesar Dominguez, John Benjamins publishing company, p 361.



speakers of Romance in Rural areas<sup>7</sup>, while Arabic was the vehicle of high culture and the language of Islamic administration and the high stratum of power<sup>8</sup>.

In the first two centuries of Islamic rule, the use of Romance was, to some extent, document. For example, in juridical record, in which non-Arabised Muslim appeared speaking in this language in court. Furthermore, there was not written description of Romance language at the level of grammar or even dictionary. This cultural absence of this language and the lack of its written traces raises actually more than one question especially during of Islamic rule in the Iberian Peninsula.

It is evident that Christians and Jews allowed to live safely under Islamic rule. They were free in their beliefs and not forced to give up anything that affect their culture. Therefore, we are surprised by the speakers of Romance who did not participate in the scientific revolution at that time or in any cultural field using Romance language as a witness to their presence at that time. Even in poetry, which was a feature of Andalusian society over the eight centuries, Romance language was not present as it should be except for the *kharja* that were at the end of the verses. To explain this situation, it can be considered that the almost non-existent of this language was due primary to its speakers. We said that Romance was a first language of rural population and lower classes, which means the common people and not the educated class. As a result, this language remained trapped in simple and daily discourse and far away from scientific and cultural beacons.

Language, thought history, has been an important transmitter of human heritage, and it reflects a culture that creates identification. Therefore, Romance language, as a communication system, was unable to transmit to us the culture, thought, values, customs and traditions that were widespread at that time among

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<sup>7</sup> Arabe andalusi y lenguas Romances, Federico Corriente, Editor Mapfire, Madrid, 1992, p34

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, P 363



its speakers, while the Arabic language left a cultural, urban and intellectual legacy that still shines its light on all of humanity. Actually, the connection between language and society is tightly anchored. Language is out of saying the primary tool for communication purposes, but it is moreless a cultural bank for any society. Therefore, language and culture cannot separate. People use the language as a means of communication to express their ideas and identity that are of course different from the other society.

Regardless of limited speakers of Romance, it remains a closed and poor language at the level of cultural and scientific production. Andalusian society was multicultural and multireligious and it was mixed of Arabs, Jews, Christians, Muslims and all of these races coexisted and interacted with each other peacefully. The Jews as an example experienced a golden age of abundant literary production during their life in Arab Andalusia due to The Andalusian atmosphere of tolerance. More, it helped Hebrew literary and linguistic production flourish despite the dominance of the Arabic language. Actually, Iberian Jews produced in Hebrew important literary works that included poetic, scientific and philosophical works. Nevertheless, Romance language was not powerful as Hebrew did, With the exception of the art of Muwashahat, in which several levels of the language overlap, from classical Arabic, colloquial, and Romance.

The art of Muwashah is different from Qasida –Arabic Poem. That is, in the poem, there is a commitment to a uniform poetic or rhyme meter, but for the Muwashah, there is no requirement for it to be restricted or restricted and it is due to Al-Washash's artistic ability in coordinating rhythm and rhyme. According to Ibn khaldoun, this art is Andalusian creativity as he said "As for the people of Andalusia, when there was a lot of poetry in their country, and its aspects and arts were refined and its elegance reached the utmost. The later ones among them



created an art which they called the Muwashah, organizing it into names”<sup>9</sup>. The freedom of rhythm in this art was not only at the level of verses, but also at the level of the languages used. The Muwashahat combined in its linguistic fabric between classical, colloquial, and Romantic. This linguistic disparity is the secret of the beauty of the Muwashahat and its literary uniqueness. However, one of the conditions for the Muwashah is to maintain fluency in the language in its paragraphs, while the output is based on colloquial language, or sometimes foreign language as Romance language. Thus, Romance had a secondary status and not a primary position, because the purpose was not to highlight a specific language, but rather to show the linguistic and cultural diversity of Andalusian society at that time in an artistic piece called Muwashah.

The association of classical Arabic with Islam, high culture, and power structures renders its knowledge highly valued. However, many western scholars linked the dominance of Arabic in Al- andalus during the Muslim rule to the Islam itself. That is, the religious meaning of Arabic as the language of the sacred message, made Arabic the only language viewed as the true language of Muslims. What is more, Romance language linked with the people of the Christian Kingdoms, that is, with the enemies of the Muslim state at that time. Nevertheless, though Arabic was connected to Islam it had a separate identity from religion unlike either Latin or Hebrew. Christians were able to learn and use Arabic without betraying their faith. Another truth and evident is the Hebrew language. It was not the official language and the Judaism was the religion of a minority of Andalusian society in the mediaeval ages. Nevertheless, the cultural and scientific heritage was noticeable and powerful with Hebrew language regardless of the

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<sup>9</sup> Considerations in the History of Andalusian Literature, Kamel Kilani, first edition, Commercial Library Press, Egypt 1924, p 233



dominance of Arabic then. That, Jewish poetry, philosophy and prosperity reached the apex of its development from the ninth to the eleventh century.

Obviously, one cannot deny that Muslims in the Iberian Peninsula and during their rule over it did not persecute the other religions as directed by Quranic injunction, both Jews and Christians preserved their religion and culture. In addition, Latin language was very limited and only used in religious services in the Iberian Peninsula, and the language that was widely used before and after the Islamic entry was the low Latin and not the standard one. Therefore, claiming that Romance language was low language because of the dominance of Arabic is not true. Furthermore, Romance language considered as a low language before the Islamic entry and it was used only in communication while Latin was used at both levels spoken and written ones.

Actually, Language is closely intertwined with individual and group identities, Because of that; each community in the society has their own language and variety in having their communication. Romance language was, in fact, a common tongue for the wide majority of the Iberian population, but it is passing language due to the almost non-existence of its cultural and intellectual production. After the fall of Al-andalus, Muslims had a choice between embracing Christianity, abandoning their Islamic religion and identity, and being displaced from the Iberian lands. Therefore, they invented a method that would allow them to preserve what remained of their identity secretly in light of those pressures. They resorted to use the secret language Aljamiado, in which they recorded everything related to their cultural achievements, and everything related to their religion, Islam. So, Aljamiado is a powerful proof of a language that resisted the authority power and left behind cultural production even though it was a secret language and used by a minority.

At the end, Al-andalus had its own language Romance of Latin origin, which was common among its people before and after the Islamic entry. The only



comment on this language that it used only for communication, and it did not leaves any written document, which portrays the use of Romance in a certain scientific field. This language is not well known, only a few written sources are available especially by Corriente<sup>10</sup> who compiled lists of lexical borrowings from Andalusian Romance into Andalusian Arabic in botanical glossaries and in ḥaraġāt poetry.

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<sup>10</sup> A Spanish Arabist, lexicographer, academic and member of the Royal Spanish Academy, died in Zaragoza on 16 June 2020.





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